

HOUSING AN AGEING POPULATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGING THE SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

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The UK is currently experiencing an exponential rise in the 50 + population with a peak not predicted until 2033. Increased life expectancy coupled with the retirement of the “post war baby boomers” presents a demographic spike which has significant implications for society. Prolonged longevity is often not accompanied by extended health, mobility and quality of life; and this represents a particular challenge for those involved in the provision and management of social housing. The choices available are heavily shaped by decreasing budgets and a lack of finance for new build solutions specific for an ageing population; and through the ‘Shifting the Balance of Care’ agenda an integrated care model based around the resident's home is promoted. The existing housing stock requires adaption but this needs to reflect the requirements and preferences of the ageing population. Despite this, providers are experiencing a significant information gap around which to base their future development plans. This research explores the available data and conducts primary research to expose the scale of the problem and readiness of the current social housing stock within North Ayrshire (Scotland). The case study allows key findings to emerge relating to the evaluation of health profile and housing stock within the Sub-Market Housing Area (SMHA); housing preferences and needs for older people established through a questionnaire survey of 1,500+ people aged 50+; and six focus groups split between residents and social housing providers. Exposing the current lack of detail within existing datasets, the research highlights the need to resolve this in order to accurately plan for the future development of the stock to ensure it responds to service needs, preferences and is appropriate for the residents.

Keywords: existing housing, housing management, ageing population, shifting balance of care

INTRODUCTION

An exponential rise in the 50+ population during the next 20 years is emerging as a key consideration in national planning with policy makers slowly recognising that the implications of this demographic shift extend beyond traditional concerns related to pensions and health care. The Strategy for Housing Older People in Scotland (Scottish Government 2011) presents an attempt to plan for the implications of this scenario, and attaches significant focus on ensuring that the housing stock is suitable and calls on providers to consider the options available to match the needs of a rapid

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rise in the older population, especially those with a poor quality of mobility and long term conditions (Clough 2003). A challenging context is presented for social housing providers who require to address a higher portion of the problem given the strong correlation between their tenants and instances of poor quality of health in old age. This makes the problem more acute for social housing providers and presents a particular challenge when viewed in the context of decreased funding for new build solutions. Indeed, the House of Lords report in 2013 on "Ready for Ageing" identified the UK as having significantly lower levels of existing specialist housing for older people than other comparable nations. The "Shift in the Balance of Care" agenda (SBC) (Scottish Government 2009) has seen a renewed focus towards managing health and social care for older people within their own homes as opposed to investing in the provision of new housing specifically for older people such as sheltered housing or care homes (Richards et al. 2006). In the absence of new build solutions, social housing providers require to focus their future development plans on the adaptation and long term maintenance of their stock around the changing needs of their tenants.

Social housing providers are further hampered by an apparent information gap which exists between predicting the care needs and preferences of residents as they get older, and the ability to relate this to the existing housing stock and its ability to respond to these requirements in terms of its availability, condition and potential for adaptation (Croucher 2008). Indeed, the importance of ensuring that the housing stock meets the needs of an older person is highlighted by its link with determining their quality of life (Evans 2003; Appleton 2002). Adapting general needs housing where residents have often brought up their family (HAPPI 2009) has been argued to promote independence and is a strong preference of older people. A small investment in adaptation or equipment has been linked to sizable reductions in formal care spending on hospitals, care homes and subsidies for shelter housing environments (Christie 2011; Audit Commission 2010). The SBC agenda stresses the key role housing requires to play as the context for health and social care as policy makers promote a shift away from the hospital care of older people. It is increasingly recognised at all levels that this is the only viable alternative in the current financial climate as already significant pressure on health and social care budgets are heightened by these demographic shifts which makes the current care model unsustainable (COSLA 2011). Social housing providers need to resolve the current information gap in order to understand the implications for their housing stock and effectively plan resources and the future development of their stock. The potential for adaptation, the implications for cost and the suitability of their stock for the long term and future care needs of the residents is not available within current census and housing management data sets. The answer to these questions will have significant financial implications for local authorities and housing associations, and will be heavily dependent on specific local factors such as the demographics, geography, levels of deprivation, age and type of the housing stock.

The construction industry has lobbied strongly for a new build solution to meet the gap in specialist housing as part of a plan to stimulate market growth, however the current policy agenda favours adaptation of existing general needs housing in the short to medium term. The CIOB, RICS and ICE have called on the industry to embrace the resulting opportunities and to ensure it poses the knowledge, skills and capacity to deliver (Building 2009). The industry needs to work with social housing providers to understand and revise their planned and reactive work programmes to accommodate changing resident requirements and to adapt the stock to integrate resources between

health, social care, and housing provision and management. A long term view is required in terms of strategy with adaptability requiring to be considered through the design, construction, handover and the long term maintenance of the stock. Indeed, some basic Lifetime Home Standards have been incorporated in the Code for Sustainable Homes for new builds. Standards are still required for the adaptation of the existing housing stock, as a need exists to align with the SBC agenda, as well as principles of whole life value and the wider sustainability agenda.

Working together will ensure the housing stock is fit for purpose and industry is prepared to support its adaptation and long term management needs. However, managing this transition is currently difficult for social housing providers as they are experiencing an alarming information gap relating to the current demand and supply of suitable housing for an ageing population. Research is required to understand the scale of the problem and readiness of the social housing stock to meet future demand, as this is necessary to shape development plans. Plugging the information gap provides a baseline for future research to assess the fitness of the construction industry to support these plans, and to propose change and identify training needs.

This research presents an empirical study which looks at the problem at a local level and sets out to establish an evidence base for future development needs for social housing within the North Ayrshire Council (NAC) area. Authors undertook discussions with various local authorities in Scotland, and NAC responded strongly and created a funded post for the first author to conduct this research with a view to providing the evidence base for their new Strategy for Older Population. The research represented the first time the 50 + had been specifically considered within the datasets and consulted about their housing needs for the long term (2012 to 2035). On commencing the research, no established method existed for addressing the information gap and the paper outlines the research strategy and methods. Some of the key findings from a multi-method research approach are established focusing on analysis of existing datasets; a quantitative survey of 1,500 50+ residents across all tenures to explore housing needs and preferences, and a consultation exercise based on 6 focus groups with residents and service providers.

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

A case study following a pragmatist perspective was identified as the suitable lens through which to explore the context. The local authority as the unit of analysis reflects the level where most of the decisions related to the delivery of housing, health and social care services are made. Focusing on a local authority area allows for the specific needs and requirements of that area to be explored in relation to its demographics, health and deprivation levels, condition of housing stock and physical geography etc. Such an approach also lends itself to a multi-method approach, as the research questions aim to be driven by the explorative methods employed and respond to the context found. Figure 1 shows the stages of the research illustrating that no firm strategy is deployed from the outset, and emphasises during the early stages a significant level of consultation and engagement with key stakeholders in order to help shape the themes, questions and methods to be explored.

North Ayrshire Council had established an information gap following the completion of their Local Housing Strategy 2011-2016. The council responded to the enquiry from the authors and funded work to establish the empirical data required to form an operational plan for developing the housing stock in line with the needs of older population in the short, medium and long term. NAC also stated that the research

conducted would be used as the basis for the production of a North Ayrshire Older People's Housing Strategy (NAOPHS). Working with the Housing Divisional Manager as a point of contact, the research sought as a priority to respond to the wants and needs of the older population, in addition to being able to justify any recommendations. The exploratory nature of the study will help NAC establish the data gaps, and begin to consider future focus for their time and resources. The subject matter of housing an ageing population is broad and complex, and by considering a single case study in depth it allows for local context to be considered which is important for shaping decisions, in addition to providing new insights, data requirements and potentially to identify ways to make best use of existing housing stock. In addition, the case study format provides a methodological approach which other LA's could adopt in the future.

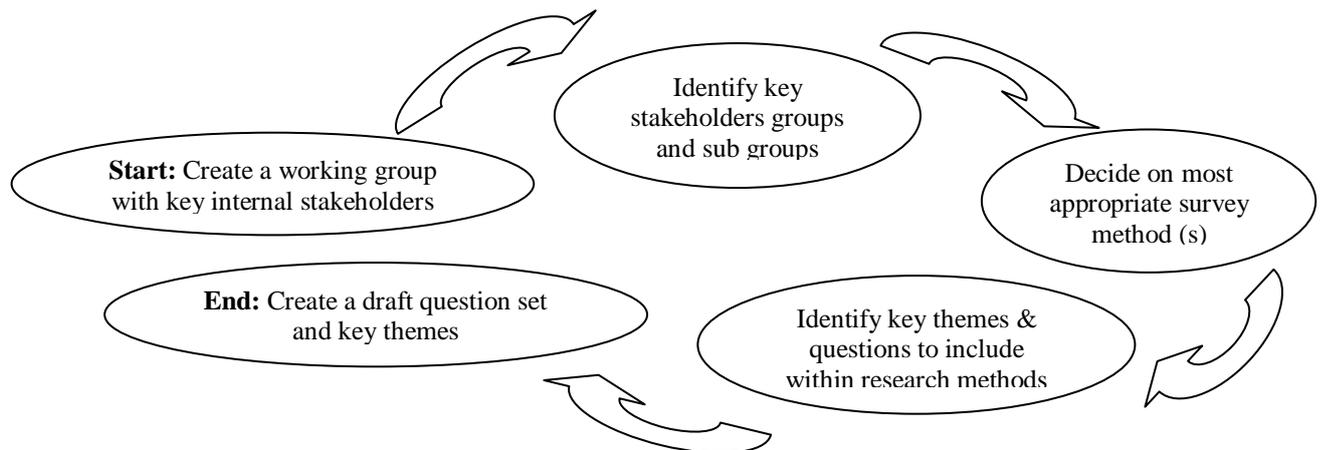


Figure 1: Initial Research Process

The research started with a literature review to establish the key themes related to this agenda from both the policy and research communities. In order to guide the overall process a working group was formed comprising of senior members from relevant internal departments within NAC i.e. Housing Services, IT (GIS specialists), Social Care, and also from external bodies such as the NHS. A series of workshops were conducted to identify the key stakeholders for the research, explore emerging themes from literature review and to establish the most appropriate methods of engagement. The stakeholders were split between category 1: Older People (50+) living in four different housing sectors: Local Authority Rental sector, Registered Social Landlord sector, Owner Occupier, and Private Rental Sector; and category 2 related to service delivery partners external to local authority: Registered Social Landlords, Private Sector providers, Voluntary Sector & Charities and the Joint Improvement Team (Scottish Government). The final category represented service delivery partners (internal) such as Housing Services, Social Services, Health (NHS), Infrastructure and Design and Elected Members.

The list of stakeholders and key themes emerging from the literature review were presented to several consultation events with each of stakeholder categories to verify and to further develop these for the local context. The process of stakeholder involvement aimed to construct validity from the outset; however it also achieved elements of stakeholder theory that were needed from NAC perspective to align with their wider commitment to stakeholder management (Simmons and Lovegrove 2005).

The findings of the working group and consultation events with key stakeholders provided the basis from which to develop the research strategy shaped around

secondary and primary data sources. The working group revealed an understanding of current data sets, areas which lack detail and the existence of data gaps. A secondary research approach founded around the existing data sources which are managed internally within NAC or by partner service providers relevant to their geographical area. Standard sources considered relate to demographics (GROS census and population projections), North Ayrshire's relation to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (employment, health, education, housing, access, and crime) and existing data related to the housing stock and development plans which is represented in Sub-Market Housing Area's (SMHA) and held in North Ayrshire Housing Register (NAHR). The first author as a development manager for the largest housing association in the area was able to supplement this data, providing access to tenure and housing management data and was involved in their future development planning. Analysis of these datasets reveals what information is available in order to shape an accurate understanding of the demand and condition of the existing housing stock.

The current housing demands outlined in the current NAC Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and Local Development Plan (LDP) are taken from the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNADA) which lacks information on age specific housing demand. Without this it is difficult to effectively plan a future strategy for developing the housing stock and to identify the requirements for the construction industry. The NAHR includes all social housing applications and provides insight into the demand for older people specific accommodation and other housing preferences of those aged 50+ looking for a social rented property and is explored.

Resident's questionnaire survey

The largest element of the research was the deployment of a questionnaire survey to evaluate wants and needs of older people in relation to housing preferences at a local level (across all tenures). The research intended to use a probability sample to determine the minimum sample size in line with other survey's deployed by NAC drawn from council tax data. However, it was quickly apparent that this sample frame did not exist as this source does not include age specific details. The use of a non-probability sampling method was agreed as the best route forward with the creation of quota categories and sample size in order to represent the population using GROS mid-year population estimates at a local area level to identify the estimated 50+ population within North Ayrshire by tenure. In order to overcome boundary problems with census data zones and SMHA, Geographical Information System (GIS) software was crucial in determining the best geographical fit of data zones within SMHA's. Given the complexity of establishing the sample an experienced consultancy (Research Resource) were asked to analysis and recommend acceptable confidence intervals per SMHA and Settlement Area (an aggregation of data zones). A sample size of 1,522 from a total population of 52,822 (GROS 2011) was agreed as sufficient to provide a robust general insight into the 50+ population of North Ayrshire's housing preferences, across all tenures. Regardless of arguments around statistical laws for representing populations through samples, given the practicalities the consultants developed the most robust method that could be financially afforded, given the available data and budget. The sample took a quota controlled approach based on 10 interviews linked to each sample point with 50+ resident's representative of tenure within that census data zone. This allowed for quotas to be developed through stratification by ward and 19 sampling points drawn in each ward. The questionnaire was developed using a range of closed and open questions responding to themes identified through the literature review and the earlier workshops with

stakeholders. The survey was conducted on the basis of an interview from 2 representatives of the council. The survey was conducted following NAC protocols to minimise bias, quality control and ethics.

Focus groups

Six focus groups were conducted to explore the central themes which emerged through the survey and literature review. The groups had differing focuses with four with older residents in different parts of North Ayrshire to explore their perceptions and needs reflective of varying levels of deprivation, and two with representatives of service providers in housing, health and social care to explore the implications and challenges faced. The transcripts were developed and analysed using thematic coding reflective of those emerging earlier in the research therefore enabling the findings to be triangulated with the secondary data, and therefore bolster and add weight to the emerging recommendations.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Demographics and tenure patterns for NAC area

Analysis revealed a particular demographic challenge faced in North Ayrshire on a number of key indicators. This is heightened by a predicted increase in demand for social housing for the 50+ population beyond levels observed nationally. Part of this picture is caused by a higher instance of social housing tenure in those below 50+ than in the current older population, a situation reflective of North Ayrshire's increasing levels of deprivation in this age range. Figure 2 displays a projection of the age profile in 2035 from a base line of 2010. It reveals that North Ayrshire has a declining population overall, but this is increasing between 65 and 74 observing a greater increase noted for the over 75's. Such a dynamic will see the overall proportion of the population be increasingly represented by those 50+ in higher levels than will be experienced nationally. The potential exists for a decline in the under 65 population to free up stock for over 65's, but whether this is suitable for their needs remains a big question.

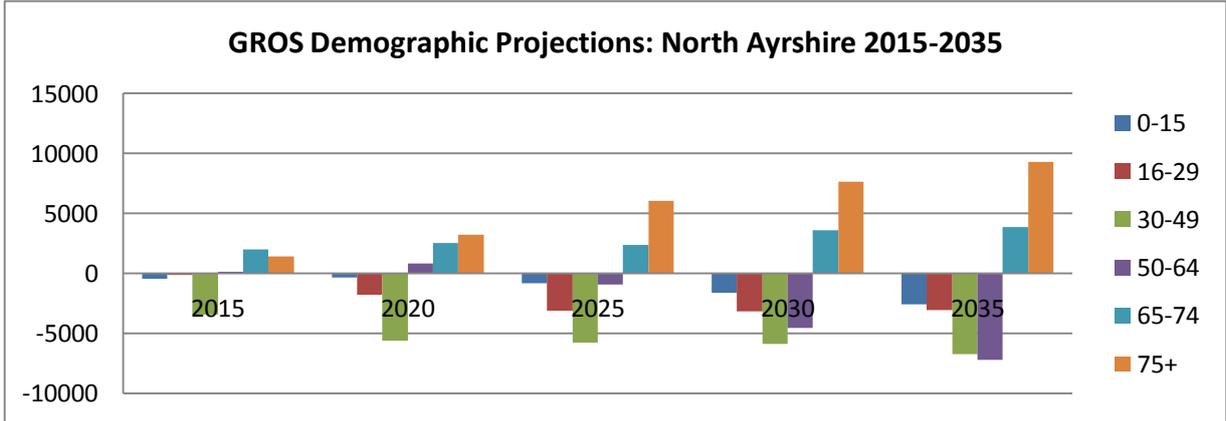


Figure 2: 20 Year Age Profile Projections for North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire displays high levels of disparity in levels of deprivation (using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) between affluent coastal towns like Largs and on the island of Arran, and inland towns with some of the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland. The coastal towns currently have a high population of 65+ residents, representing a significant proportion of NA's owner occupiers and the popularity of these towns for retirement. A significant concentration of social housing is observed

within the inland towns such as Irvine with higher levels observed than in the national average across all age ranges. The coastal towns display high life expectancy, and health data reveals an ability to maintain an active quality of life (with minimal mobility and care requirements) well into their old age. This contrasted with the inland towns, with lower life expectancies but also lower quality of life observed in their older age with an increasing proportion of those requiring care provision in their 50's and 60's. Increased care requirements, coupled with an observed increase in demand for social housing amongst those aged 50-64 within these inland towns has potential implications for housing and care provision over the next 20 years. Those with the longest life expectancies and highest quality of life (over 75) are predominantly owner occupiers and live within the coastal towns. The focus groups revealed a concern amongst social housing providers that this situation may change over time as existing home owners facing affordability issues and potential pension shortfalls apply for social rented accommodation. Indeed early data is indicating that this trend has begun and the focus groups revealed five common perceptions which have the potential to increase the reliance on the social housing: 1) lack of suitable older people specific housing in the private sector; 2) lack of suitable older people specific housing in the private sector, 3) affordability issues with owner occupation in later years, 4) the need to release home equity to generate much needed additional income, and 5) a perception that the social rented sector is the main provider of older people specific housing (Research Resource 2011).

Supply and demand for housing for older people

In order to understand fully supply and demand within North Ayrshire, firstly a breakdown of the property types currently available within the social housing stock is shown in figure 3.

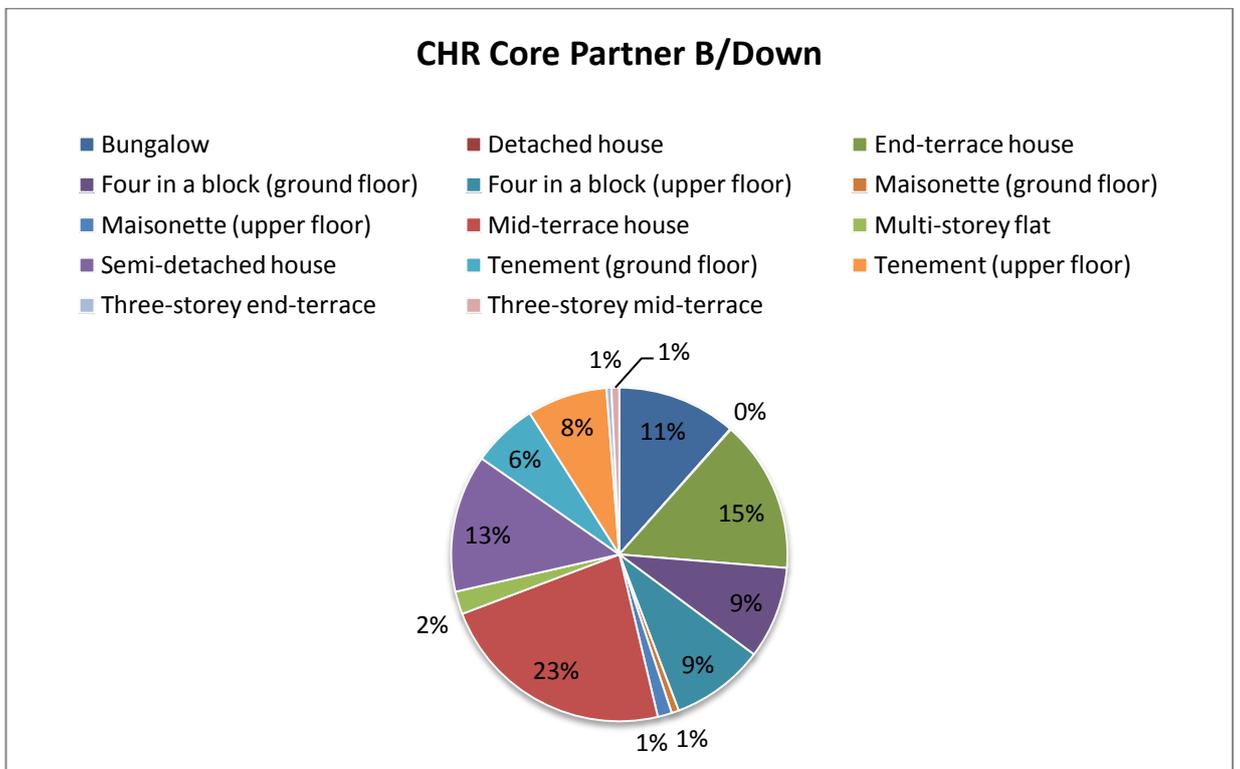


Figure 3: Stock Breakdown for Core Partners of Social Housing

This provides a useful baseline to compare the findings from the resident's survey regarding their preferences and needs broken down by age bracket (50-64; 65-74; 75+). The survey revealed that within the 50-64 range there is generally a good mix of house types that would be acceptable and that the supply was available. Within the 65-74 range a very distinct pattern emerges with three clear house types emerging as preferences in priority order: Bungalows, Ground Floor Tenement and Ground Floor Four in a Block (Research Resource 2011). A basic building stock survey for NAC revealed that the properties currently available within the social housing sector that fit these broad categories only equates to approximately 26% of the stock available. A warning emerged during a focus group that there is no guarantee that all of these houses will be suitable. Only 13% of current social housing is specifically for older people, with the remainder designated for 'General Needs'. Analysis revealed that with new build rates of less than 0.4% (since 2005) of the existing stock, a picture is presented where despite an obvious demand the finance is absent for a building programme which is consistent with the literature review. This will result in the needs of the ageing population requiring to be facilitated largely through the existing stock.

The survey and focus groups consistently reported that residents want to stay in their current homes, with 77% reporting they would not want to move regardless of their care needs. Indeed, 88% of those surveyed had no plans to move home, and this coupled with the increased time people spend in their homes during older age presents a need to encourage older people to think about their current housing circumstances and whether it would fit their changing needs if their health or mobility deteriorated. For those considering moving significant problems were reported in terms of market flexibility and mobility due mainly to the economic climate and a lack of suitable social housing for their needs. The preference for bungalows is equally challenging as these tend to have a higher private market value and are rarely available in social sector. The focus groups outlined an increasing problem caused by a lack of understanding amongst residents of the options available in terms of the available house types within the stock, and their implications for differing care needs. A need was identified for social housing managers to better advise and raise awareness amongst older people of the choices available.

Evolving general needs housing for an ageing population

If 'General Needs' housing is to emerge as the key environment to deliver health and social care as part of the SBC agenda, social housing managers will need to assess the extent to which the stock can be adapted and respond to people's changing health and mobility needs. The principle option for older people who have a declining quality of life but wish to remain as independent as possible within their own home is through 'equipment and adaptations'. This term is used to describe a whole range of options that can help transform a home from a burden to a safe and independent living space. Remaining at home provides greater independence and a feeling of security to people who suffer from a long term illness or disability. Equipment and adaptations involves ensuring the building fabric is energy efficient (and so reducing fuel poverty), but also assists in preventing falls in the home, helping carers and improving physical and mental health of older people. There are also many examples of the cost effectiveness of investing in equipment in adaptations when compared to the costs of emergency hospital admissions and associated care costs (Heywood and Turner 2002). This agenda places the home and community at the heart of future care provision.

However, evidence emerged through this research that this agenda is slow to be realised in practice. The questionnaire survey revealed that as many as 29% of people who reported they needed equipment and adaptations, currently have not received the work. The focus groups highlighted that this situation needs to be resolved in order to reduce the risk for older people's health and resultant increased cost for the NHS. In order to deliver this agenda effectively, housing managers will need to place equipment and adaptations within their refurbishment, renovation and maintenance planned works regimes.

Low level support was identified as playing a significant role in improving the quality of life of older residents and reducing the risk of falls around their home. Maintenance is identified as key to ensuring the equipment is functional and in removing the risk from around the house (i.e. carpets, doors, stairs, bathrooms, kitchens). Maintenance teams need to engage with older residents in order to respond to their needs. The provision of handy men and tradesman who are trained to listen to older people's concerns and periodic risk assessments for trips and falls has potential to provide low level support which has a big impact. A joint approach between housing, health and social care is recognised as part of the policy agenda, but social housing providers need to understand the implications for developing housing stock. Focus groups identified a current lack of preparedness within the local construction industry in the number of companies with capacity, knowledge and skills to support its delivery. Construction professionals were identified to lack awareness and understanding of the needs of older residents and training was highlighted as a need.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Adapting the social housing stock to reflect the needs of an ageing population will require financial resources to facilitate its delivery. A key component of ensuring that a suitable budget is provided for social housing will be to establish the link between not adapting the general needs stock and the instance of fuel poverty and frequency of falls incurred from an unsuitable environment for older people and the resultant cost implications for health and social care. Recognising the savings which can be made between the different services is the only way to establish a joint approach, and housing provides the key context within which this will be delivered. The SBC agenda has far reaching implications for social housing providers and the future development of their stock, as they will experience a significant portion of the burden. However, evidence showed that future planning is hampered by an information gap which stops an accurate picture emerging on the current condition of the stock and its ability to respond to the needs and requirements of the ageing population. The compilation of this data in a format that can be analysed and proven to be robust will be crucial in identifying the proportion of the housing stock capable of being used or adapted for older people. Establishing the balance of existing housing currently or potentially available for housing older people across each Sub- Market Housing Area is important across all tenure types for social housing providers to plan for the future

North Ayrshire provided a worked case study revealing that the current stock profile displays insufficient detail to determine what properties are suitable for older people and which properties have been and could be adapted. Data matching, cleansing of the software systems and collection of the data gaps is required in terms of stock condition with a view to considering demographic projections over the next 20 years. NAC has responded to this finding and is in the process of finalising a 100% stock condition survey which records a number of age specific criteria (e.g. accessibility of

downstairs bathrooms) in order to construct a clearer picture of housing stock. NAC are also constructing an accessibility criteria for the existing social rented housing stock to establish 'what they have' in order to identify 'what they need' both now and in the future, to house an ageing population. Private rented and owner occupier sectors were also identified as requiring further research given the emerging realisation that even less information was currently available relating to the stock condition and tenure amongst these sectors.

Establishing a community profile (housing, health, and age profile relating to the 50+ population) initially at SMHA level would help establish the needs of different areas, identifying hot spots for action based on pressures observed within the profile and to foster a business case for adapting suitable general needs housing for older people reflecting variations in care needs and preferences. These profiles have the potential to help justify and shape local authority decisions ensuring that the limited resources available are allocated where they are most needed. The collation of robust data sets that are updated on a regular basis could provide a framework, identify data gaps and make best use of available information, with a view to making best use of the existing social housing stock. The findings have implications for social housing providers by highlighting the need to establish the readiness of the current stock by shaping future development plans for new build programmes, planned works (refurbishment) and reactive maintenance management. Work is then required with the construction industry to ensure knowledge, skills, and the capacity exists to deliver this in practice. Without this evidence, it is difficult to see how housing managers can plan the requirements to align their stock with the Shifting Balance of Care agenda, as well the wider sustainability agenda (environmental, social and economic).

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